

NHRC Talks Readiness, Resilience with 21st Century Sailor Director

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SAN DIEGO (NNS) -- Rear Adm. Karl Thomas, director, 21st Century Sailor Office, met with researchers at the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC), Sept. 20, to learn more about how science can help Sailors overcome adversity and thrive.

"The research we conduct at NHRC aligns nicely with the goals of the 21st Century Sailor Office, which is to maximize total force fitness by promoting resiliency," said Capt. Marshall Monteville, NHRC's commanding officer. "At NHRC, our research aims to promote the physical and mental readiness, health and resiliency of warfighters."

From the work being done by NHRC's Health and Behavioral Sciences Department to develop programs that promote healthy behaviors, to the sleep studies being conducted by scientists in the Warfighter Performance Department, optimizing readiness and warfighter health is NHRC's mission, said Monteville.

During Thomas' visit, he learned about specific studies underway in support of 21st Century Sailor initiatives, as well as NHRC's capabilities and how they could support Sailors and families with future research initiatives.

Jay Heaney, environmental physiologist, discussed his physical readiness research, including body composition assessment guidance and metrics and scoring criteria for the Physical Readiness Test (PRT). Heaney and his team have future plans to evaluate the PRT with the aim of developing an alternate assessment that is more operationally relevant.

"Physical readiness is not about how many sit-ups and pushups you can do," said Heaney. "It's about your ability to respond to an emergent situation in an operational environment."

Thomas also learned about NHRC's health and behavioral research to reduce service members' risky and destructive behaviors and promote positive, healthy ones.

"One research focus is identifying risk and protective factors for psychological and behavioral health problems," said Cindy Thomsen, department head for NHRC's health and behavioral sciences. "We can then develop interventions for individuals who are not on a good path."

Thomsen also talked about several workbooks her team has developed to support the well-being of service members.

- * The "Post-Deployment User's Guide" - a workbook to help service members dealing with behavioral health challenges following deployment
- * "The Docs" - a graphic novel for Navy hospital corpsmen that highlights the psychological challenges they may face in combat
- * "Life After Service" - a workbook for transitioning services members with tips and resources for managing behavioral health concerns as they leave the military
- * The "Navy Corpsman Wellness Guide" - a stress management guide for reducing caregiver stress

Thomas also toured the Warfighter Performance Laboratory to learn how NHRC leverages science to address issues that impact readiness, including sleep and fatigue mitigation, injury prevention and rehabilitation, and environmental physiology.

During his tour, Thomas was able to see NHRC's cutting-edge research tools, including the Computer Assisted Rehabilitation Environment (CAREN), an immersive virtual reality system; a sleep and fatigue lab; and an environmental chamber, a large structure that can simulate environments with temperatures ranging from -23°F to 130°F. Having each of these complementary research capabilities under one roof fosters collaboration and enables a wide range of research possibilities.

"It was an honor to have Rear Admiral Thomas visit and learn what NHRC has done, is doing, and can do to support the 21st Century Sailor Office," said Monteville. "Ultimately, we are all targeting the same goal: optimizing the readiness and resiliency of our Sailors and their families."

As the DoD's premier deployment health research center, NHRC's cutting-edge research and development is used to optimize the operational health and readiness of the nation's armed forces. In proximity to more than 95,000 active duty service members, world-class universities, and industry partners, NHRC sets the standard in joint ventures, innovation, and translational research.

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